What is claimed is:

1. A clamp comprising:

a handle assembly;

a gripping assembly having a pair of jaws that can be opened and closed to grip an element, the pair of jaws being parallel to each other when they are opened and when they are closed; and

a flexible shaft having a proximal end that is operatively coupled to the handle assembly and a distal end that is operatively coupled to the gripping assembly.

2. The clamp of claim 1, wherein the pair of jaws are parallel to each other at all times, including when the jaws are being opened and being closed.

3. The clamp of claim 1, wherein the shaft is completely flexible without any external support, yet is capable of withstanding axial loads.

4. The clamp of claim 3, further including a rigid element that can be placed in a first position where the rigid element supports the shaft in a manner where the shaft cannot be bent, and in a second position where a portion of the shaft can be bent.

5. The clamp of claim 1, further including:

a cable carried within the shaft, the cable having a proximal end that is operatively coupled to the handle assembly and a distal end that is operatively coupled to the gripping assembly; and

wherein the gripping assembly includes:

a jaw housing;

a cable terminator movably retained inside the jaw housing and securing the distal end of the cable; and

a link that pivotably couples each jaw to the jaw housing.

6. The clamp of claim 5, wherein each link is also pivotably coupled to the cable terminator.

7. The clamp of claim 5, wherein each link is a first link, and further including a second link that pivotably couples each jaw to the jaw housing.

8. The clamp of claim 1, wherein each jaw receives an insert, and wherein a space is defined between the insert on each jaw when the jaws are in the closed position.

9. A method of performing a medical procedure, comprising:

(a) providing a clamp comprising:

a handle assembly;

a gripping assembly having a pair of jaws that can be opened and closed; and

a flexible shaft having a proximal end that is operatively coupled to the handle assembly and distal end that is operatively coupled to the gripping assembly;

(b) inserting the jaws through a first incision or port;

(c) inserting a secondary instrument through a second incision or port so that the secondary instrument can grip the jaws and articulate the jaws to a desired position; and

(d) causing the jaws to be closed to grip a blood vessel or tissue.

10. The method of claim 9, wherein the clamp further includes a rigid element that covers the shaft and that can be retracted along the shaft, the method further including:

retracting the rigid element along the shaft so as to expose a portion of the flexible shaft; and

bending the exposed portion of the flexible shaft.

11. A method of performing a medical procedure, comprising:

(a) providing a clamp comprising:

a handle assembly;

a gripping assembly having a pair of jaws that can be opened and closed; and

a flexible shaft having a proximal end that is operatively coupled to the handle assembly and a distal end that is operatively coupled to the gripping assembly;

(b) inserting the jaws through an incision or port;

(c) inserting a secondary instrument through the same incision or port so that the secondary instrument can grip the jaws and articulate the jaws to a desired position; and

(d) causing the jaws to be closed to grip a blood vessel or tissue.

12. The method of claim 11, wherein the clamp further includes a rigid element that covers the shaft and that can be retracted along the shaft, the method further including:

retracting the rigid element along the shaft so as to expose a portion of the flexible shaft; and

bending the exposed portion of the flexible shaft.